

Graffiti – art or crime?



October 2017. Kindly contributed by Sean Delaney, PRU, Bexhill, Sussex. Search for Sean on www.skillsworkshop.org

Please refer to the download page for this resource on skillsworkshop for detailed curriculum links and resources including a second related PPT by the same author.

Functional English curriculum links

Speaking, listening and communication.

L1: Take full part in formal and informal discussions and exchanges that include unfamiliar subjects.

L2: Make a range of contributions to discussions in a range of contexts, including those that are unfamiliar, and make effective presentations .

Reading

L2: Select, read, understand and compare texts and use them to gather information, ideas, arguments and opinions

- Select and use different types of texts to obtain and utilise relevant information
- Read and summarise, succinctly, information/ideas from different sources
- Identify the purposes of texts and comment on how meaning is conveyed
- Detect point of view, implicit meaning and/or bias
- Analyse texts in relation to audience needs and consider suitable responses

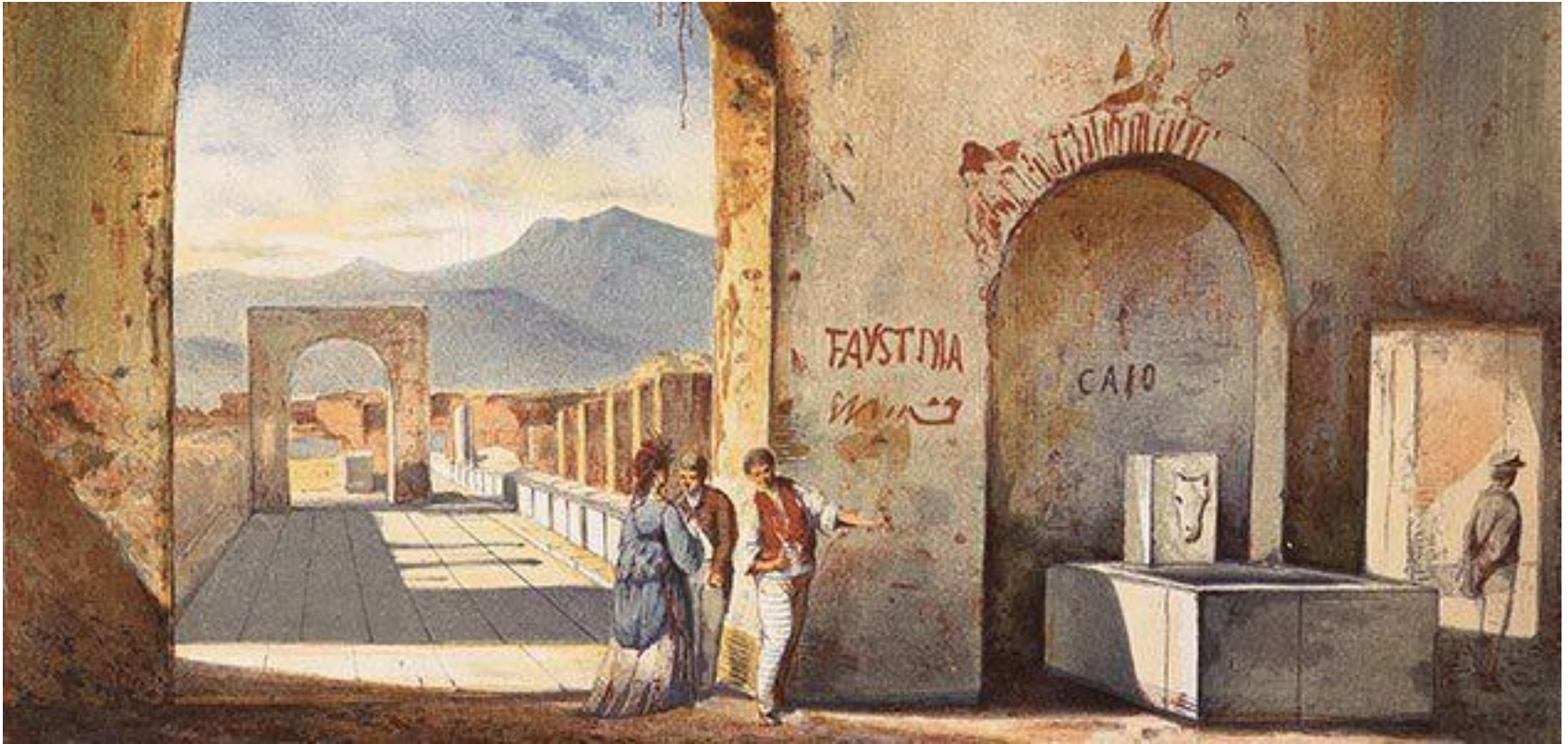
Graffiti – art or crime?



Think of one good thing about graffiti – and one bad thing.

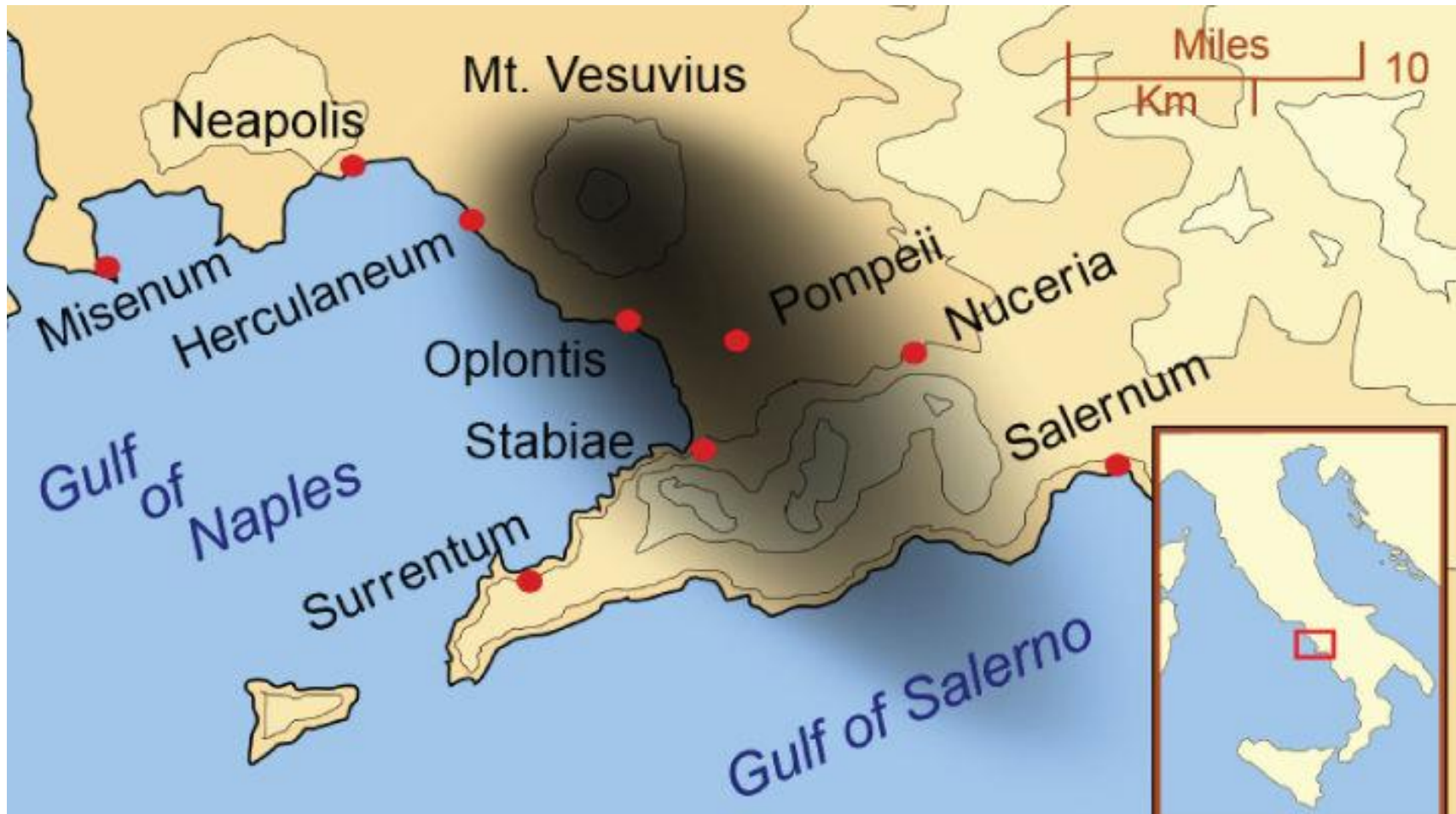
Be prepared to share your thoughts

People have been making graffiti for thousands of years

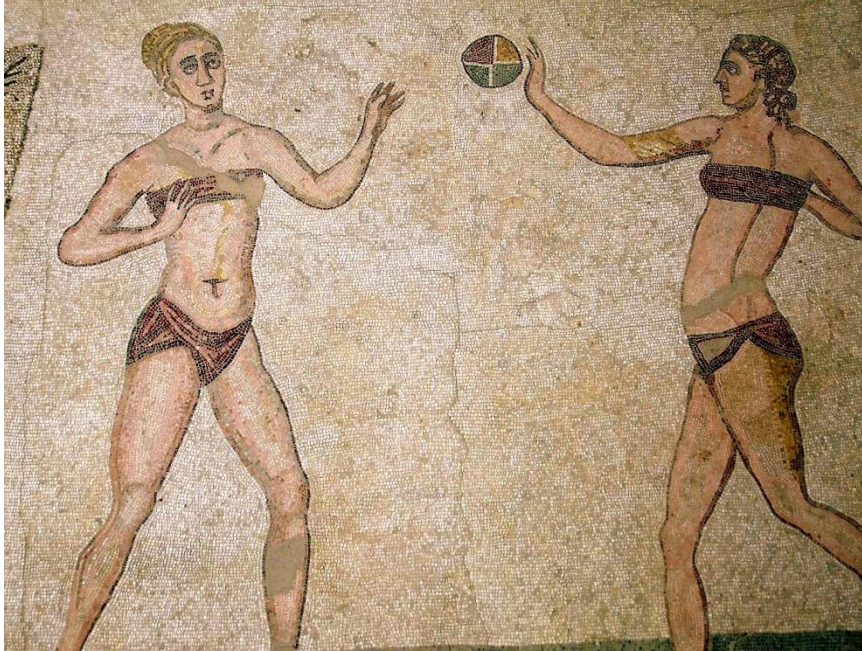


Street scene from the Ancient Roman city of Pompeii
c. 75AD. Can you spot the graffiti?

Pompeii was famous for something else...can you remember?



Ancient Roman graffiti was
very rude...



Roman mosaic
(decorative tiles)

[http://www.pompeiana.org/Resources/Ancient/Graffiti
%20from%20Pompeii.htm](http://www.pompeiana.org/Resources/Ancient/Graffiti%20from%20Pompeii.htm)

Modern graffiti – art or vandalism?



Can graffiti *improve* run down areas?



Graffiti – criminal behaviour or art?



Should vulnerable people in our community have to put up with it?



Studies have shown that there is a link between....



Links between graffiti and crime

- The mere presence of graffiti doubles the number of people littering and stealing in a neighbourhood, new research suggests.
- The results are detailed in the journal *Scientific & Industrial Research*.
- Signs of disorder, such as broken windows, [graffiti](#) and litter, can lead to individuals breaking other social rules. In New York's "Quality of Life Campaign," adopted in the mid-1990s, city filth, including graffiti, street litter and signs of vandalism, were removed. And petty [crime rates](#) did drop.



In the UK, the maximum penalty for graffiti crime is 10 years in prison.

Even some rapists and murderers don't get that!



Jailed with Rapists and Murderers: Why Is the Punishment for Graffiti in the UK So Extreme?



23 year old Skeam was given a 30 month prison sentence for his graffiti crimes.

He died in prison.

Skeam in
happier
days



Graffiti – art or crime?

I knew things had gone too far when it was announced that graffiti writer Skeam had been found dead, hanging in his prison cell.

While many questions have been asked during the inquest into his death, an important one remains: **why was this 23-year-old handed a 30-month jail sentence for painting walls and trains in the first place?**

Barely a month goes by without a graffiti artist being sent to jail.

While GCSE art students and Italian tourists pay £20 a pop for a Shoreditch street art tour, writers are receiving heavier punishments than ever before. The maximum penalty for 12 to 17-year-olds is 24 months of detention, while adults can be sentenced to up to ten years in prison.

"Malicious mischief", as vandalism is legally termed, might be a non-violent, victimless crime, but, for whatever reason, Britain has decided to make itself one of the only countries in Western Europe where artists can be punished with **hefty custodial sentences.**

Whether or not you're a fan of graffiti, surely it's easy to recognise that it's an offence best punished with a fine or community service, not a prison sentence – a penalty that costs the taxpayer and inflicts far more suffering on the artist than is really deserved.

English writing
Level 1 & 2 skills

What techniques is the writer using here?

What technique is the writer using to communicate with a young audience?

Why is this in inverted commas?

What is another way of saying this?

Art or crime – 2

Once he was released from prison, Robson struggled to adapt to life on the outside. "When you get out, it takes a long time to adjust, to get back into the world and out of the system, and to feel relaxed and to make amends in your personal life," he said. "Plus, when people know you've done time, they do treat you differently; people are wary of you." Robson argues that there were many other ways he could have been punished: "It'd make more sense to give a community order or a fine, or put someone on tag, or all of the above, rather than to lock someone up. It's a shame that these kind of sentences are now the norm for what is a relatively harmless, non-violent crime."

Unfortunately, **the disproportionate sentencing that Robson and many other writers receive has glamourised prison for younger generations.** "They think it's a badge of honour," said Robson. "They think to be **a prolific graff writer** you have to have done time. But you're supposed to be known for being **prolific** at what you do, not because the police have made you **prolific.**"

Sum up what Robson is saying here in one sentence.

What does that mean, 'disproportionate sentencing'?

How can prison be 'glamourised'?

What does prolific mean?

What is the power of 3 being used here?

Art or crime - 3

Like Robson, G.Money has also served time for spraying walls and trains. Arrested in 2008 at his home address by Detective Colin Saysell, the UK's top anti-graffiti officer. Throughout his career he's helped to convict at least 300 graffiti artists, earning him the moniker "the graffiti bogeyman".

"I have the same name as my dad, so they actually told him he was being charged with conspiracy to commit criminal damage," said G.Money. "When I came downstairs there were six officers, including Detective Saysell, **who was wearing a Banksy T-shirt and a pair of baggy jeans, with some sailor tattoos on his arms.**"

G.Money went on to serve almost four years on bail, before eventually being sentenced to 21 months in prison. While this might sound like more than enough, the British Transport Police (BTP) – the force that deals with a large amount of graffiti cases, sending 569 suspects to court in 2005 alone – were far from pleased. "They were pushing for international conspiracy charges, but these were dropped on the last day," said G.Money. "BTP can't nick people for what they do abroad. In the end, our case cost way more than the damage we committed. After all, I was only found guilty of £50,000 worth of damage."



Does this seem strange – or **even ironic?**

Irony = when something seems like the wrong way round

Art or crime – 4

Inside, G.Money was surrounded by a selection of seasoned criminals. "I was mixed with murderers, rapists and serial killers. **How am I rubbing shoulders with a high-profile armed robber who's killed people when all I've done is graffiti?"** he asked. "Custodial sentences are way too strong. People would be less likely to paint if they got a £50,000 fine."

So what impact has hefty sentencing had on the graffiti community itself? What happens when writers like VAMP are sentenced to a staggering three and a half years in prison?

What drives people to risk their lives to spray surfaces.?

G.Money told me he'd been electrocuted and had high-speed trains hurl past his face – and that he'd known people who'd been killed while painting – but that the danger never turns anyone off.

Does it come down to thrill, notoriety, obsession, creative expression, escapism, straight-up insurrection or the drive to mark territory?



In persuasive writing or speaking & listening, what is this technique? Why is it effective?

Speaking & Listening preparation

Putting across your ideas on graffiti – should graffiti artists be sent to prison?

Note taking and rehearsals

1. Introduce yourself and say what you would like to tell us about today.
2. Describe what graffiti is, and how far it goes back.
3. Confession time – have you ever done it!?



S&L preparation and rehearsal

4. What is the worst thing the law can do to you in the UK if you are a graffiti artist?
5. Describe what prison was like for some graffiti artists.
6. Is this fair? Why not?
7. Conclusion – what needs to be done in the future?

